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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED SENSITIVE CAPTION)

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS DESTRUCTION (CWD) ASSISTANCE TO IRAQ:  
PROGRAMS, PROGRESS, PROSPECTS

SUMMARY

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: With one of the highest levels of landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination in the world, and possibly millions of small arms and light weapons (SA/LW) in the hands of insurgent groups, militias and private citizens, Iraq has struggled to make progress in reducing the impact of conventional weapons on its citizens. Since 2003, the U.S. (working through the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement, PM/WRA) has invested over \$132 million to help Iraqis free themselves from the humanitarian and economic impact of Explosive Remnants of War (ERW). This funding has been successful in the clearing of over 14 million square meters of land and over 140,000 pieces of ordnance; the destruction of over 19,000 confiscated weapons, the initiation of the ongoing Landmine Impact Survey (LIS), Victim Assistance Programs; and Mine Risk Education for thousands of Iraqis.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT CONTINUED: PM/WRA and Embassy Baghdad are focused now on improving Iraqi capacity and political desire to take ownership and to exercise direction of Iraq's National Mine Action Program, as well as on discouraging an ill-conceived Ministry of Defense plan to take over humanitarian demining. Fitful efforts by the GoI to take the lead in addressing these issues are beginning to achieve some modest results. Post and PM/WRA will continue the effort to guide Iraq toward independence in humanitarian demining and related fields, including by encouraging an effective division of labor between military and civilian programs. END SUMMARY

U.S. INITIATIVES

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3.(SBU) Although the full extent of the problem of explosive remnants of war is still unclear, existing information shows Iraq to be one of the most seriously contaminated in the world. Conflicts with Iran in the 1980s and coalition forces in 1991 and again in 2003, as well as Saddam-era campaigns against Iraq's Kurdish population and internal fighting since 2003, have left large areas virtually unusable. Some international estimates put the number of landmines remaining in Iraqi territory as high as 25 million.

¶4. (SBU) In 2007, the Department established a temporary two-person CWD office at U.S. Embassy Baghdad. The primary duties of this office include serving as the CWD strategic planning advisors to the Embassy, Iraqi Ministries, International Organizations (IOs), Coalition Forces (CF) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). CWD advisors oversee numerous PM/WRA in-country programs and assist Iraqi ministries in developing plans for the removal and destruction of conventional weapons and munitions including landmines, unexploded ordnance, abandoned ordnance, man portable air defense systems (MANPADS) and SA/LW.

¶5. (SBU) In addition, the CWD office develops the governance capability of the Iraq National Mine Action Authority (NMAA), assists in developing tactical plans for CWD in the Iraqi oil fields within the Ministry of Electricity, Environment, Oil and others as

required. To date this office has had oversight of \$25 million in funding for Humanitarian Mine Action activities in Iraq, provided direction in the clearance of 14,209,403 square meters of land, the survey of 1,019,667 square meters of land, the destruction of over 12,000 mines and 137,089 pieces of UXO.

¶ 6. (SBU) From 2003 through 2008, the U.S. Government provided more than \$132 million, while other governments and assistance organizations contributed another \$21 million toward conventional weapons destruction in Iraq. While the Conventional Munitions Clearance Program, through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, made initial progress, large stockpiles of conventional munitions were left unsecured and available to Iraqi insurgent groups, and the problem of large areas littered with mines and unexploded ordnance was only partially addressed.

¶ 7. (SBU) The GoI, through U.S. technical and financial assistance, formed the National Mine Action Authority (NMAA) under the Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation with overall responsibility for mine action policy, planning, coordination and budget management for clearance, mine-risk education and landmine survivors' assistance. Although the NMAA was to be responsible for mine action in all of Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government assumed control over mine action in the three northern governorates in 2004 and has retained responsibility since that time.

¶ 8. (SBU) Working initially with expatriate advisors, the NMAA formulated policies of accreditation for mine action organizations and even developed a strategic plan in 2004 to begin prioritizing mine and unexploded munitions clearance. However, as security deteriorated in 2005 and 2006, charges of corruption were made against the director and senior staff, and a series of internal problems surfaced; the effectiveness of the NMAA rapidly declined. Finally, in June 2007, the GoI closed the agency entirely, pending the eventual decision on a new ministry to take charge of mine

¶ 9. (SBU) Through PM/WRA, the Department has lead the CWD effort in Iraq, funding several initiatives to build capacity, clear and return land, and destroy weapons and munitions. Initial U.S. funding to build clearance capacity amounted primarily to strengthening existing mine and unexploded ordnance clearance organizations, with over \$15 million funded to the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a UK based NGO in northern Iraq, as well as to develop new clearance organizations in the central and southern portions of the country. Additionally, efforts were made to increase capacity within the GoI as well as to nurture an Iraqi non-governmental organization, the Iraqi Mine/UXO Clearance Organization (IMCO) - which has yielded strong results.

¶ 10. (SBU) A significant amount of U.S. funding has gone into establishing and sustaining IMCO. IMCO continues as the only active clearance organization outside of the Kurdistan region, despite funding shortages throughout 2006 and 2007 that reduced its operations to basic life support and limited and sporadic clearance activities. With a current strength of about 200 technically capable personnel, IMCO has the capacity to double its numbers in a relatively short period of time.

¶ 11. (SBU) Through 2007, all U.S. financial support for IMCO had been channeled through a contracted technical advisor team, but this year IMCO took its first steps toward becoming a more independent organization with the start of direct funding grants for FY 08. Improvements in security have enabled IMCO to increase its operating tempo, conducting various clearance projects with the direct grants as well as funds from other sources. PM/WRA has also provided IMCO \$897,865 for the development of a mobile SA/LW destruction capability which, aimed at reducing the number of poorly-secured, excess and confiscated weapons in the hands of Iraqi security forces and Coalition Forces. To date over 19,000 of these targeted weapons have been destroyed. While IMCO represents a major success story, its future is under challenge from several directions.

¶ 12. (SBU) IMCO is scheduled to lose the lease on its present training and weapons destruction facility in Baghdad shortly. Due to the impending loss of its lease, IMCO has had to refuse incoming shipments of confiscated weapons and is now actively looking for an

alternate location in Baghdad while simultaneously re-opening a site in Basrah. Moreover, there is a move afoot within the Ministry of Defense to have it, and all other humanitarian de-mining efforts, subordinated under MOD control. Embassy Baghdad is working to turn around this MOD initiative.

**¶13.** (SBU) Meanwhile MAG, which began working in northern Iraq in the early 1990s, has expanded its capabilities, and moved from a primary focus on humanitarian demining to the more balanced approach, giving equal emphasis to destruction of conventional munitions and SA/LW. As the most established clearance organization in Iraq operating in a relatively permissive security environment, MAG has a well-established infrastructure that is staffed primarily by Iraqi nationals with a limited number of expatriate technical advisors and senior managers, numbering as many as 750 personnel.

**¶14.** (SBU) Since 2004 the U.S. Government has provided over \$4 million for the Iraq Landmine Impact Survey, which has identified over 8,500 dangerous areas and 1,600 affected communities in thirteen of Iraq's eighteen governorates. Although suspended in 2006, the LIS has begun again, and will complete the remaining governorates of Al Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Baghdad, and Diyala. Qgovernorates of Al Anbar, Ninewa, Salah ad Din, Baghdad, and Diyala.

#### TOWARD GOI LEADERSHIP

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**¶15.** (SBU) In early 2008, the GoI decided to transfer responsibility for mine action to the Ministry of the Environment, but to this point, progress under the Ministry has been extremely limited. Minister of the Environment Narmin Othman Hassan, who has little experience in the mine action field and who must devote much of her time to duties as Minister of Women's Affairs, has expressed frustration with the pace of progress. Deputy Minister Dr. Kamal Hussein Lateef has spent most of the year studying the proposed structure of the National Authority, now known as the Mine Action Directorate, and looking for a capable Director General.

**¶16.** (SBU) Progress has also been hampered by the sporadic nature of assistance from the UNDP Senior Mine Action Advisor, who is based in Amman and visits Baghdad only periodically. Minister Hassan has also recently rejected the nominee recommended by both her deputy and UNDP for Director General, potential delaying the reestablishment of a NMAA. Recently there has been growing interest by the GoI to include the Ministry of Defense in Iraqi demining programs and meetings are currently being held to decide the direction this effort may take.

**¶17.** (SBU) One positive development has been the Minister of Environment's proposal to employ up to 500 unemployed people from the Basrah governorate as mine action workers. With very little clearance infrastructure remaining in Basrah, the plan poses significant, but manageable problems. IMCO has committed to training and employing 100 people in a pilot project that would lead to the mapping of most minefields in the southern governorates over the twelve-month period of the project. UNDP has also proposed a similar effort through the NGO Rafidain Demining Organization (RDO) but is unlikely to be able to deliver in the next six to twelve months, given the limitations of RDO and the limited presence of UNDP mine action personnel in Iraq.

**¶18.** (SBU) Nonetheless, IMCO has moved forward with plans to reestablish a base of operations near Basrah which will support the Ministry of Environment's employment project. Moreover, the project will position IMCO for potential projects that support the expansion of oil production and exploration in the south, where many oilfields and production facilities are seriously contaminated with mines and ordnance.

#### PROSPECTS

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**¶19.** (SBU) As the GoI continues to grapple with developing a coherent approach to the problem of mine and unexploded ordnance contamination, there are several reasons to be concerned about the slow pace of advance. Foremost is the humanitarian imperative for

removing these hazards as quickly as possible. Although there are no reliable estimates for how many civilian casualties are caused annually, conservative estimates put the figure at about 300 victims each year. Anecdotally, in one village of less than one thousand people living along the Iranian border there are known to be at least thirty children who are landmine victims, and the actual number throughout the country could conceivably number in the tens of thousands.

**¶20.** (SBU) Second, as the security situation in the country has steadily improved, reconstruction and development projects have again begun grow in number. Without an effective coordination body within the GoI, there is still no mechanism for prioritizing and contracting the clearance work that is needed. Unless more money is allocated to a central coordinating body, mine and ordnance clearance could depend more on who is willing to pay the most, resulting in emphasis on economically profitable demining at the expense of other less profitable but equally important projects.

**¶21.** (SBU) Finally, with only limited clearance capabilities existing throughout most of the country, expansion of this capacity is becoming more urgent. The GoI has the financial resources to support expansion, but so far it has not done much to support or promote this need. Post and PM/WRA will continue the effort to guide Iraq toward independence in humanitarian demining and related fields, including by encouraging an effective division of labor between military and civilian programs.

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